

## The Monk and the Missionary

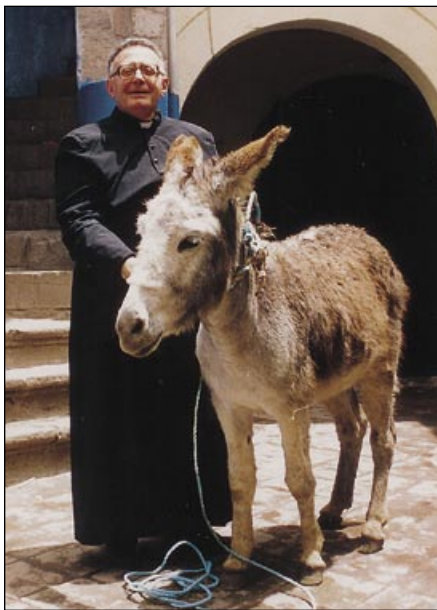
*Montes in circuitu eius: et Dominus in circuitu poplui sui.*

Mountains are round about it: so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth now and for ever. (Psalm 124)

October 2007

Dear Friends of Clear Creek Monastery,

Although, as the adage would have it, “a monk out of his cloister is like a fish out of water,” it is sometimes necessary to leave the monastic paradise for a moment, in order to accomplish the designs of Divine Providence in conformity with holy obedience.



**Father Giovanni Salerno, founder of The Servants of the Poor of the Third World.**

In early September, it was thus my privilege to accompany Father Abbot of Fontgombault Abbey (our Mother-house) to Cuzco, Peru, where a new Order of Missionaries, *The Servants of the Poor of the Third World*, has its headquarters. The object of the visit was the crowning of the statue of Our Lady, *Mother of the Poor of the Third World*, inside the beautiful new church located on the grounds of the orphanage for boys, and to pay of a debt of friendship.

This majestic spot a few miles outside of town, surrounded by high mountains, certainly suggests to a monastic soul a comparison between the material heights the missionaries must climb in order to reach the furthest villages, and the spiritual ascension the soul must undertake in order to find God. I suppose this is just one of many analogies we tend to find between, on the one hand, the life of true missionaries, who lay down their lives to bring the Gospel to peoples dying of hunger for Truth, and, on the other, that of the monk who preaches the same Gospel in a silent manner, by

simply giving his entire existence to God, who is Truth, in a life of prayer.

The ties between these particular missionaries and our monastic family of Fontgombault go back many years. As Father Giovanni Salerno, the founder of *The Servants of the Poor*, was seeking means of support for his mission, someone gave him the name of our Abbey of Fontgombault. While visiting France he stopped by and found the monks ready to assist him, not only in the publication of a French newsletter for his missions, but more importantly in terms of a serious commitment to pray for the missionary Priests in the field.

Foundation for the Annunciation Monastery of Clear Creek

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**Brother Raphael teaches catechism to the children at the Yarcaccunca Mission.**

He had come to understand that this was the most important factor of success for the missions.

While in Cuzco, after the beautiful Mass of September 8 — during which Father Abbot Antoine of Fontgombault crowned the statue of Our Lady (with a crown of real gold offered by a benefactor) — I was invited along with two other monks to follow a missionary to one of the villages where one of the Priests offers Holy Mass each Sunday. This was not one of the most remote villages, but we had nonetheless to cross a pass along a dusty road in the Andes at an altitude of about 12,800 feet in

order to get there. While the Priest heard confessions of many of the villagers and some of the Sisters belonging to Father Salerno's Order taught catechism to various groups, we monks visited some of the houses and blessed several of them.

After Holy Mass, there was quite a feast for all who attended the Mass. We sat on the ground in a circle in the courtyard surrounding the rather dilapidated church, as some of the Sisters assisted by women of the village brought the food that had been cooking all morning. After the usual potatoes, which are the main staple of these people of the high altitudes, we were presented with a special gift from the village, a whole boiled guinea pig! Although somewhat embarrassed as to how to deal with such a delicacy (especially without the benefit of any forks or knives), we were most touched by the kindness of these very poor but generous people of the Andes.

“The Lord chose me to be the donkey that carries Him on the narrow roads of the High Cordillera.” It is thus that Father Giovanni characterizes his own vocation to follow the poor Christ among the poor. He has often received serious death-threats from Marxist groups and others who would like to be rid of his presence in Peru.

In addition to the missionary Priests and Sisters, his missionary order is comprised of a small branch of contemplatives and a fervent group of missionary families. Among the missionaries of the various branches, there are Italians, French, Spaniards, and at present, one American missionary family.



**Young girls learn to perform their native Peruvian dances.**



The missionary Fathers run a school for orphaned or very poor boys at the City for Boys, outside of Cuzco. In town, near their beautiful new convent (bursting with novices), the Sisters have a school for the girls and a facility for handicapped children. The stark reality is that very many of these girls, if they were not in the school, would be sold into the very big business of child prostitution, which operates in Cuzco. Father Giovanni was even offered money for the handicapped children to be sold for body parts!



Local school children wait to perform at an assembly.



Eager faces in the classroom.

It seems rather ironic that in this very poor region of the world the missionaries are at present much less in need of financial support than of generous men and women willing to consecrate themselves to this work. The vast and beautiful buildings of the City for Boys outside of Cuzco (recently dedicated) could welcome many more orphans than are currently living there, but there are not enough missionary Priests to care for them properly. The missionaries have been more successful in finding young women amid the local population to enter the community of Sisters. Father Giovanni spends part of each year traveling around the world in search of generous souls willing to help him. There will, of course, always be a need for financial support as well.

The monk and the missionary tend to understand one another. In the Middle Ages, before the establishment of missionary orders, it happened that monks were sent as missionaries. Abbot Dom Paul Delatte writes on this subject:

*The first concern of these monastic preachers of the Gospel upon arrival in a new country was to found monasteries: eager as they were to recover for themselves that form of religious life to which they were accustomed, and convinced that the efficacy of their word depended on their assiduity in the practice of the Holy Rule. The monastery was the center of life, doctrine, prayer*



Brother Raphael engages the children in a sing-along.



**Adoration of our Blessed Lord occurs during school hours at St. Maria Goretti School.**

*and edification. It was a conquest in the Roman fashion through the setting up of an entrenched camp, by taking possession of the land. The evangelist was the monastery itself, the preacher with a hundred voices that were silent neither day nor night. Perhaps the mark of Christianity has nowhere been so deep as where monks were the first apostles.*

Maybe Clear Creek really is a “mission” of sorts, situated in the middle of an America that has all but lost its Christian faith and culture.

We thank you most heartily for all the help you have given us over the past eight years. How quickly those years have gone by! We now eagerly await the the transfer to the new monastery. Our construction company expects to hand the keys over to us at Christmas. In the meantime, we have now completely filled up our present monastery, with the arrival of four new Postulants in less than two months.

May God Bless you and Our Lady keep you and protect you under her immaculate mantle.

*br. Philip Anderson, Prior*

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*The Servants of the Poor of the Third World*, whose official title is *Opus Christi Salvatoris Mundi*, were erected as a Public Association of the Faithful by the Archbishop of Cuzco on December 27, 2000. Their contact information in the United States:

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**One of the Sisters bottle-feeds a newborn baby brought to the Mission.**